

PART

3

The Fur Trade



1618
Étienne Brûlé
travels west toward
Lake Superior, trading
fur and looking for the
Northwest Passage.

1690
Henry Kelsey
explores inland
to the Canadian
prairies, the first
European to see
the bison.

1739
Pierre de
La Vérendrye
reaches
Lake Winnipeg.

1778
James Cook
arrives at
Nootka Sound,
Vancouver Island.

7. The Early Days of the Fur Trade, 1604–1760

8. Into the Great Northwest

1670
The Hudson's Bay
Company is formed
by royal charter. It is given
rights over all territory
whose waters drain into
Hudson Bay.

1701
Forty First Nations
sign a peace treaty
at Montreal.

1771
Samuel Hearne
and Matonabee
explore the
Coppermine River.

1779
The North West
Company is
established in
Montreal.



1793
George Vancouver
maps the Pacific Coast.

1793
Alexander Mackenzie
reaches the
Pacific Ocean by land.

1812
David Thompson
completes his survey
of 3 million square
kilometres of land
west of Lake Superior
to the Pacific, and begins
work on his Great Map.

1816
Twenty-one
settlers are
killed in the
Battle of Seven Oaks.

1848
The Guillaume Sayer
trial breaks the
monopoly of the
Hudson's Bay
Company.

9. A New Nation: The Métis

1808
Simon Fraser
explores the
river that later
bears his name.

1812
Lord Selkirk
founds the
Red River Colony.

1821
The North West
Company and
Hudson's Bay
Company merge.

7

The Early Days of the Fur Trade, 1604–1760

Sara and Ben were hot, dusty, and tired. They were helping their great aunt Lettie clean out her basement. She was going to move to a condo soon, and she wanted to start packing up.

“I’m moving because my children want me to,” she said, “but I’d rather just stay here. This is where my father was born. My grandfather lived in an old cabin back there.” She pointed out the window. The cabin had fallen down and rotted away long before Ben and Sara were born. All they saw was a place where the grass seemed to grow a little higher.



Figure 7.1 The Hudson’s Bay blanket was once an important trade item.

"I remember my father telling me about the way things used to be, and about how life was for his grandfather. Our people have been on this land for generations. And now I'm leaving them, and all their memories, behind." She opened a trunk that Ben and Sara had just wrestled up from the basement.

"See these blankets? Even these blankets have memories."

"Auntie, they're just old blankets. How can they have memories?"

"Look at them. A good blanket was like gold for trading. These blankets were some of the best." Ben and Sara looked at the worn blankets. It was a little hard to believe. "Aboriginal peoples trapped fur, and they traded the pelts for things they didn't have. The Hudson's Bay Company shipped in blankets to trade for fur."

Now Ben and Sara were sure their aunt was telling them stories. "Auntie, the Bay is just a department store!"

"Oh, maybe it's just a department store now, but once it was 'The Company of Adventurers of England trading into Hudson's Bay.' Men fought and killed each other for the beaver pelts that could buy these blankets." She looked at Ben and Sara and laughed. "I can see that you don't believe me. It is hard to believe, isn't it?"

Ben and Sara looked at the blankets again. Sara thought, "She's either teasing us, or it's true. I'd like to find out." She

As you read, think about

- why the fur trade began
- where the fur trade took place
- who worked for the French fur trade
- who worked for the Hudson's Bay Company

looked at Ben. She could tell he was thinking the same thing. But where would they start?

In this chapter, you will go back a few hundred years, back to the beginning of the fur trade and Samuel de Champlain's first voyage to the New World. You will learn more about the fur trade, who was involved, and how the trade developed. You will look at the beginnings of the Hudson's Bay Company and at how Canada grew because of the fur trade.

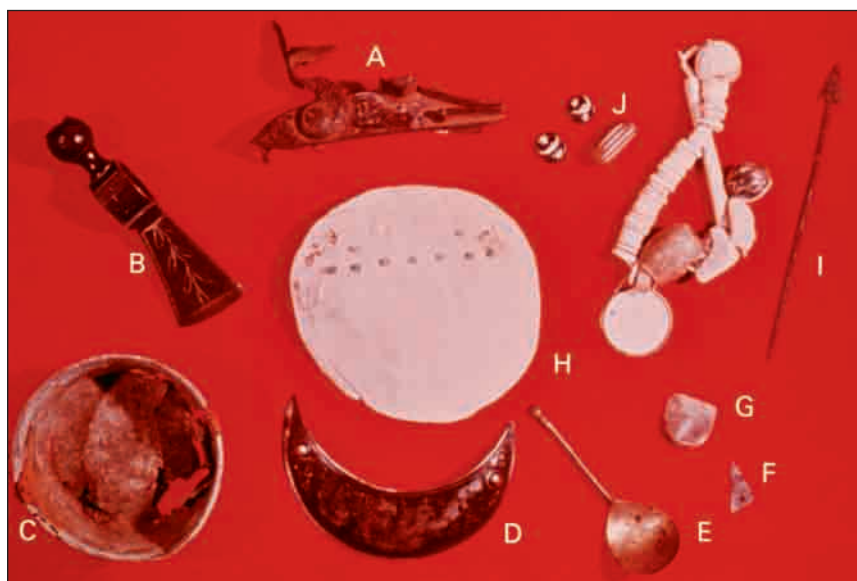


Figure 7.2 Historic trade goods from the early days of the fur trade: A) a French flintlock device for a musket; B) a pipe in the shape of a ceremonial brass axe; C) a brass kettle; D) an English silver gorget; E) a French brass spoon; F) a spear point made from a fragment of a brass kettle; G) a French gun flint; H) a conch-shell and glass-bead pendant; I) an iron spearhead; J) European trade beads from the French period, as well as native stone and shell beads.

The Fashion that Fuelled the Fur Trade

From about 1550 onward, the beaver felt hat was what gentlemen (and ladies) wore to keep themselves dry in the rainy weather of London, Paris, and other fashionable European cities. The beaver hat was so popular that beavers had been hunted, almost to extinction, in Europe and Russia. So far there had been no suitable replacement that worked as well and looked as good.

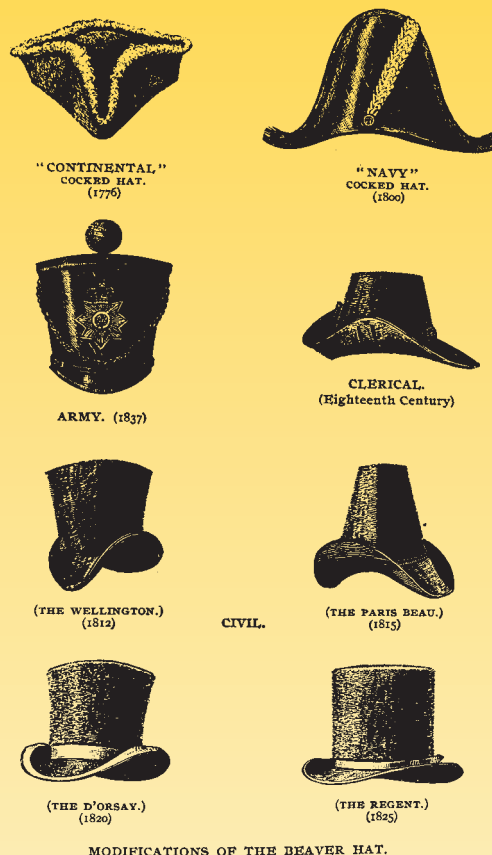
Right around the time that the beaver shortage might have become a real fashion crisis, European explorers and seafarers started looking for a Northwest Passage to Asia. As you know, they did not find a passage for many years, but they did find lots of beavers. Beavers were very plentiful in North America. Aboriginal peoples used their pelts for blankets and clothing. When the Aboriginal peoples found out that the Europeans were willing to trade items they wanted for beaver pelts, they were pleased to oblige.

To King Louis XIII of France, beaver fur was not gold, but it was the next best thing. He thought that fur would provide France with a source of wealth. That wealth would allow him to expand his colonies, find the Northwest Passage, and become one of the most powerful kings in Europe.

As you read in chapter 4, the early colonies at Port Royal and Quebec were established mainly as fur-trade posts. At first, the economy of New France was entirely dependent on the fur trade. Furs were sent to France. In return, France sent colonists and the supplies and tools that

The beaver hat

The beaver hat was not actually made of fur. It was made of felt. Felt was made by shearing the beaver's short hairs that grew close to the skin. The little hairs were barbed on the end, like a burr, or Velcro. This made beaver especially good for felt that was warm and held its shape in the rain. Because hatters wanted only the short underhairs of a beaver skin, they actually liked getting older, used pelts that already had the longer guard hairs worn off. They liked winter beavers and beavers that came from the north the best, because they had the thickest fur.



MODIFICATIONS OF THE BEAVER HAT.

Figure 7.3 A nice beaver hat was expensive. Some hats were even passed on from father to son in wills. This illustration shows eight different styles.

they needed to survive. By the time King Louis XIV took power, the colonies had grown. The colonists who lived there began to support themselves through agriculture

and other trades. Yet, the fur trade continued to be an important part of the economy of the mother country.

England also wanted to profit from the fur trade. However, as you saw in chapter 6, the English were not interested in settling British people in these northern lands. They were more concerned with building a good business. Both countries knew they needed strong alliances with the Aboriginal trappers to succeed. This was especially important, because France and England had been enemies for many centuries. The rivalry would continue in the North American fur trade.

There's a good reason for the saying "mad as a hatter." People who made beaver felt hats used a mixture that contained mercury. The fumes caused brain damage that made them slur their words, twitch, and walk with a lurch.

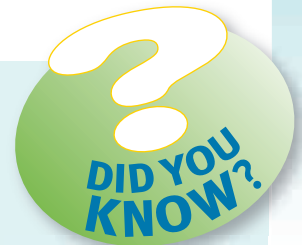


Figure 7.5 Mad Hatter, from *Alice in Wonderland*



Figure 7.4 This fur-trading scene appeared on a map of Canada from 1777.

Rivers and Lakes

One reason the fur trade developed as it did was because of Canada's rivers and lakes. Look at the map on this page. The St. Lawrence River was the main river of the early French settlements of Quebec, Montreal, and Trois-Rivières. If you look farther west, you will see the St. Lawrence River flows from lakes known as the Great Lakes.

From their Aboriginal allies, the French traders heard about lands farther west. They were told that if they travelled inland, they would find more beavers and more riches to send home. They might even find the Northwest Passage.

The simplest way to reach these western lands was by canoe. There were many different types and sizes of canoes, and many different methods of making them. Every Aboriginal group had some sort of canoe. In the far north, frames made out of driftwood were covered in animal skins.



Figure 7.7 This illustration shows what Europeans thought about hunting beavers in Canada in the late 18th century. They believed beavers lived in multi-level dwellings. Hunters could kill the animals easily using either a bow and arrow or a gun.



Figure 7.6 EARLY FRENCH FUR-TRADE POSTS

In forested areas, birchbark was used. A small birchbark canoe was light enough to carry from place to place, yet it could hold 100 beaver pelts. If the canoe was damaged, the materials needed to fix it were all around.

As you think about how the fur trade developed in New France, imagine the countryside as it was over 400 years ago. There were no roads, only pathways, and **portages**, that led from one waterway to another. Until you got to the prairies, you were surrounded by rolling (and sometimes very rugged) hills and a lot of trees. The rivers and lakes provided the easiest, quickest mode of travel. They were the highways of the time. Even in winter, it was easier to walk along a frozen river pulling a

sled than it was to trudge through the deep snow in the woods.

The land and rivers also supplied the fur traders with the things they needed to live. Their Aboriginal guides taught the Europeans how to hunt and fish for food to supplement the dried corn and salt pork that they brought with them. They taught them which berries could nourish them when food was scarce. They supplied them with pemmican, made from bison or other game, and wild rice that grew in the waterways they travelled. Their Aboriginal partners showed them how to make medicines from the plants in the forests. In winter, fur traders wore warm clothing and moccasins made of animal skins.

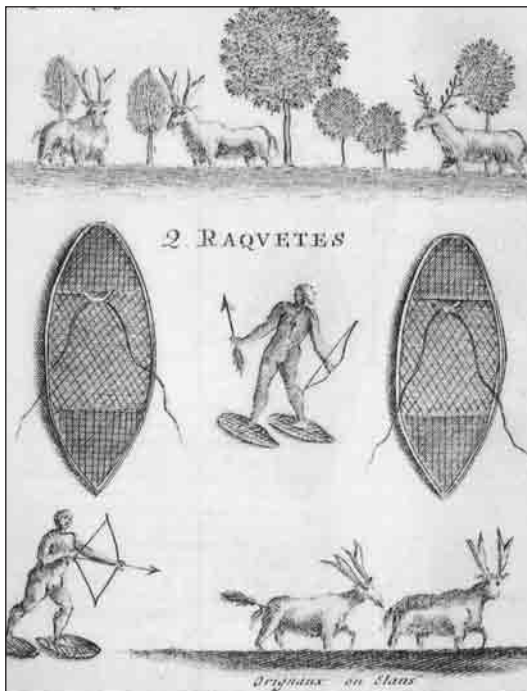


Figure 7.8 This drawing, by Louis Lahontan, a French soldier and adventurer, is from his memoirs, published in 1703. It shows snowshoes and bows and arrows, useful equipment that French fur traders adapted from the Aboriginal peoples and that allowed them to survive on the land.



Figure 7.9 Fur traders relied on canoes to travel lakes and rivers.

The French Fur Trade

Early partnerships and conflicts

The early French traders knew nothing about trapping animals. They did not know much about the land, where to find the animals, or how to survive in the northern wilderness. They needed to rely on people who were experienced in hunting, trapping, and living in the cold climate of North America. They formed a partnership with the Wendat people and their allies, the Algonquin and Montagnais. These Aboriginal allies could bring the French furs of the highest quality from their traditional hunting grounds.

In 1609, Samuel de Champlain and his men fought with their allies against the Iroquois. The Iroquois, who had never seen or heard guns before, were quickly defeated by the small force of Wendat and French, who were armed with guns known as **arquebuses**. This was the beginning of



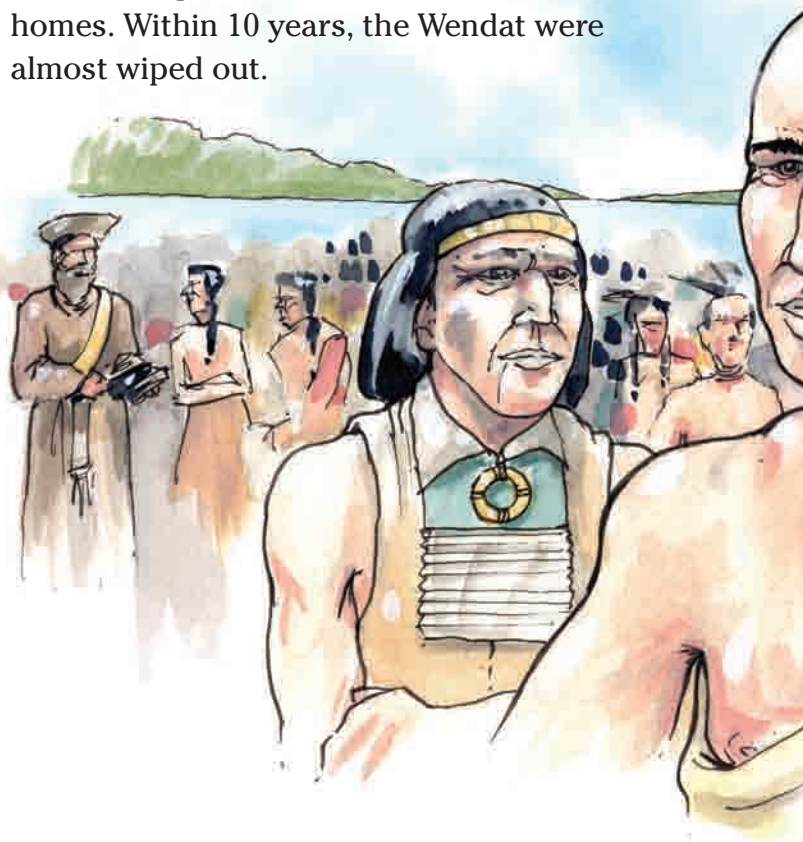
Figure 7.10 Champlain fires his arquebus. This is the only picture of Champlain that survives from his lifetime.

The Iroquois Confederacy, 1500 or earlier

The Iroquois were one of the most disciplined and organized groups in North America. Well before the Europeans came, a great prophet named Dekanahwideh brought together five warring nations, the Mohawk, Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, and Oneida to arrange a peace treaty. They created the **Great Law of Peace**. Each clan had an equal vote, and they had to completely agree on all their decisions. The **Iroquois Confederacy** became the most powerful Aboriginal alliance in North America.

a conflict between the French and Iroquois that would last more than 90 years.

By 1640, however, the Wendat had been weakened by smallpox that they had caught from the Europeans. The Iroquois, now armed with guns from the British and Dutch, took control over former Wendat territory and began to cut off the French fur trade routes. Many Wendat were killed. Others were taken prisoner or forced from their homes. Within 10 years, the Wendat were almost wiped out.



The Great Peace of Montreal, 1701

By the 18th century, the French, their allies the Wendat and Algonquins, and the Iroquois Confederacy wanted peace. Both the fur trade and farms of New France were being affected by constant attacks; and the Aboriginal peoples were being weakened by disease, hunger, and constant war. All knew that to survive they would have to reach an agreement. In the summer of 1701, Louis-Hector de Callière, the governor of New France, invited 1200 representatives from 40 Aboriginal nations to find a way to end the decades of wars. On August 4, after days of talks, a treaty was signed. The Iroquois gained fur trapping and trading grounds, and the French were able to grow their crops without worry. The Iroquois also promised to remain neutral in any battles between the French and the English.

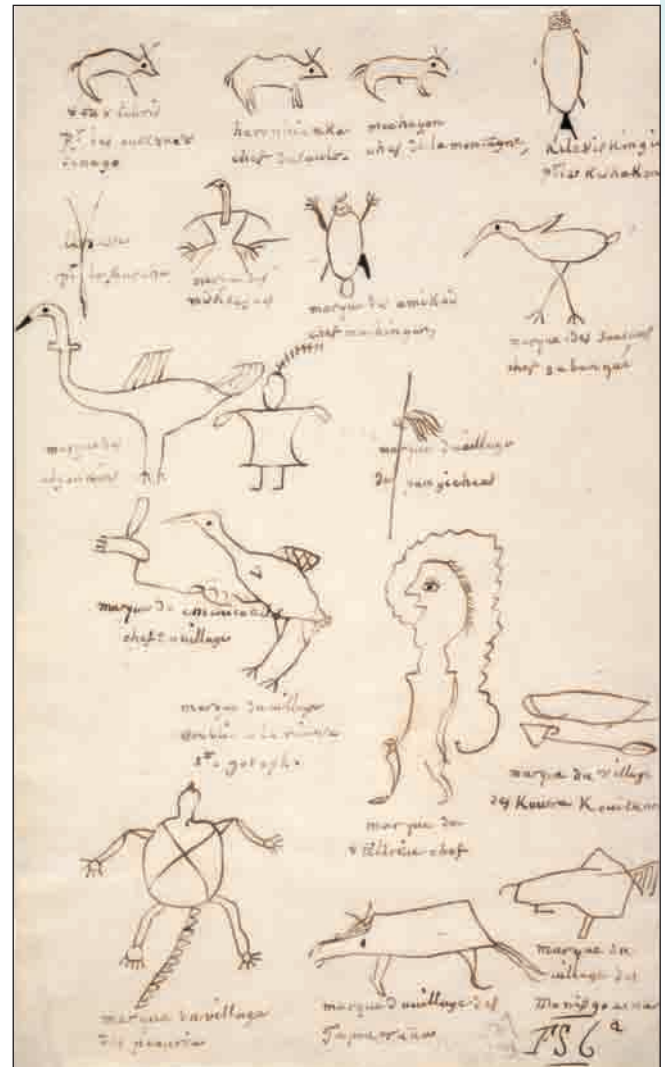
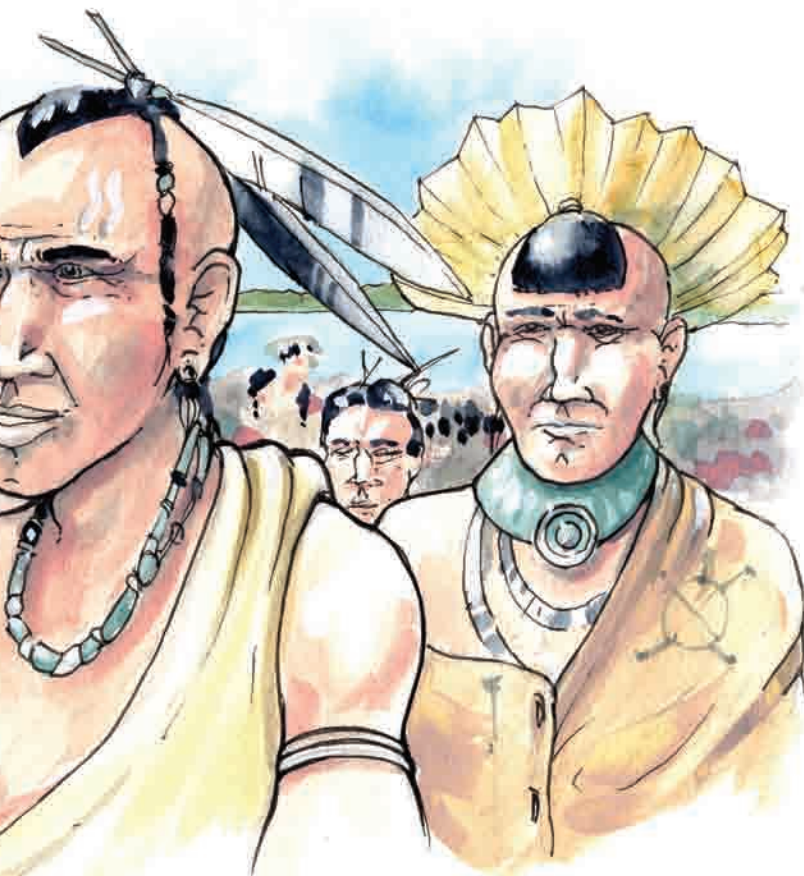


Figure 7.12 Each of the 40 chiefs who took part in the Great Peace treaty signed the document by drawing a picture of the totemic animal of his clan. Many kinds of birds and animals were drawn.

Figure 7.11 Leaders from 40 First Nations met to negotiate peace in 1701. They came from as far as James Bay to the north, the Great Lakes to the West, New York to the south, and the Maritimes to the east.

Roles of the French Fur Trade

Aboriginal trappers

In the winter, Aboriginal trappers trapped animals and prepared furs. In the spring, as soon as the rivers were free of ice, they transported the furs to trading posts on the St. Lawrence River, where they traded for items from Europe. Merchants supplied things such as metal tools, knives, guns, and kettles, in return for the trappers' furs.

Aboriginal guides

European explorers and traders relied on Aboriginal guides, whose ancestors had been travelling the waterways for centuries, to lead them to new fur-trading grounds. The guides, both men and women, also acted as translators and mediators. They supplied explorers with important

information about new territories and the people who lived there.

Coueurs de bois

Some French settlers soon realized they could make money by trading for furs themselves, instead of waiting for the Wendat to bring furs to them. They became coureurs de bois, independent fur traders. Coureurs de bois travelled west and north into the interior of the country, trading directly with Aboriginal trappers. The government of the colony wanted sole control over the trade and its profits, however. They viewed the coureurs de bois as outlaws. Still, just about every family had at least one “runner of the woods,” who made a much greater profit trading furs than he would have made farming the land as a habitant.

Étienne Brûlé

Étienne Brûlé was the first coureur de bois and is probably the most well known to historians. In 1610, Champlain arranged for Brûlé, a young man of about 18, to live with a Wendat tribe. From them, he learned to speak their language, and he adopted their customs. After several years, Brûlé was brought back to Quebec City. There, he worked as a scout for the fur traders and as an interpreter between the Wendat and the French. Brûlé also explored territory west and south of Quebec City. Champlain regarded him as a son.

In 1624, a Récollet brother named Gabriel Sagard convinced Champlain that Brûlé was working for both France and France's enemies. Champlain and Brûlé had a quarrel, and Brûlé left the colony and returned to live with the Wendat.

The Iroquois twice captured Brûlé. He may have escaped torture the first time, in 1615, because he

promised to promote an Iroquois alliance with the French. He was again taken by the Iroquois in 1629, after he had helped the English capture both Quebec and Champlain. Brûlé escaped, and he returned to his Wendat village. When he told the Wendat about his capture, they accused him of trading with the Iroquois. They considered him a traitor and, in 1633, they tortured Brûlé to death.

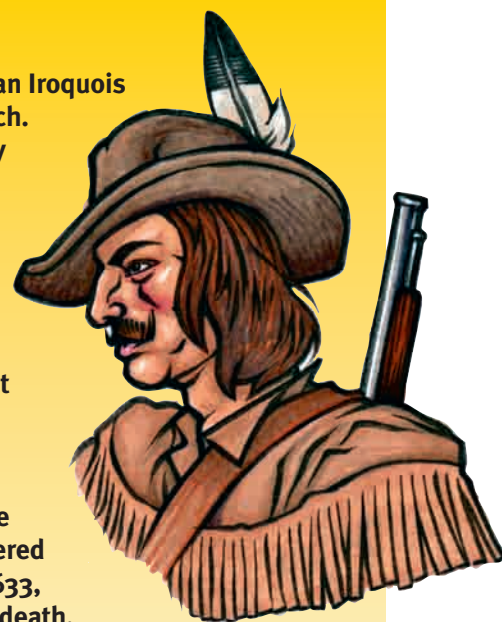


Figure 7.13 Étienne Brûlé



Figure 7.14 Trappers, guides, traders, merchants, and women were all important to the success of the fur trade.

Voyageurs

Around 1680, the government of New France, in an effort to stop the independent trade of the *coureurs de bois*, began granting licences to traders. These traders became known as “voyageurs.”

Merchants

The merchants of New France were in charge of purchasing pelts from the fur trappers and supplying the trappers with items for trade. The merchants were mainly interested in beaver pelts, but they bought just about any kind of pelt, including wolf, ermine, and fox. Merchants then sent the furs back to Europe in return for money. They could charge a high price for the pelts, which were in great demand from Europeans who used them to make hats or trim fancy clothes.

Dogs

Before they had horses, many Aboriginal peoples used dogs to help them on their

journeys. Dogs were excellent companions for trappers and fur traders: they could warn of enemies or wild animals, they could carry furs and supplies on travois or sleds, they helped hunt, and if food got scarce they could be eaten.

The role of women in the fur trade

Aboriginal women were important partners in the fur trade. Women prepared the furs for trade, made food such as ground corn, and sewed clothing and moccasins. Women chopped firewood and tended fires. They also made items that were crucial to the survival of the fur traders, such as snowshoes and fish nets. Most important, they acted as mediators and translators between Europeans and Aboriginal peoples.

Women also prepared pemmican, a mixture of dried meat that was pounded and then mixed with berries and fat. Pemmican was portable, extremely high in calories, and full of protein. Because of the vitamin C in the berries, it ward off scurvy. Pemmican never spoiled. It was the fuel that kept the voyageurs going.

Radisson and Groseilliers

The coureurs de bois Pierre Esprit-Radisson and Médard Chouart Des Groseilliers probably changed the fur trade more than anyone else. They came up with the idea to ship fur to Europe via Hudson Bay. They first went to the French, who were not interested

in their plan. Then they went to New England, but they could not get anyone there to back them. So Radisson and Groseilliers travelled to England to see if anyone there would be interested. Although Radisson and Groseilliers were French, they were the ones who opened up the fur trade to the English.

A conversation with Pierre Esprit-Radisson (1640–1710)

Imagine you had a chance to meet Pierre Radisson. This is what he might tell you about himself.

I came to New France with my half-sister when I was just a young boy. I'm not even sure how old I was because birth dates weren't that important back then.

Those were the days of the Iroquois raids. During one of these raids, my sister's husband was killed. In another raid, I was taken captive by the Iroquois. I was lucky. I was young and strong, and an Iroquois family wanted to adopt me.

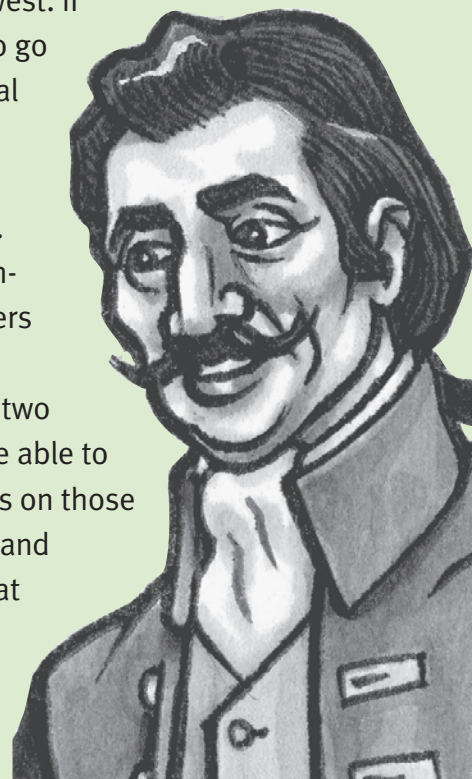
I learned the language, and enjoyed the Iroquois way of life. It was from them I learned about the forests and rivers of New France. Still, I wanted my freedom, and so I escaped. I was quickly recaptured and then punished. I won't even tell you about that. I'd rather forget.

They would have killed me, but my Iroquois family intervened. I didn't stay long, though. I soon escaped again and returned to Europe.

How drab and dreary it was after my life of adventure in the woods! I had to return to New France.

When I returned in 1654, a short-term peace alliance with the Iroquois gave us just enough time to find out that there were a great many furs available in the northwest. If we wanted to go where the real money was, we needed to find a way. My brother-in-law Groseilliers figured that between the two of us, we'd be able to get our hands on those beaver pelts and the riches that would come with them.

Figure 7.15



A conversation with Médard Chouart Des Groseilliers (1618–1696)

Imagine you had a chance to meet Médard Des Groseilliers. This is what he might tell you about himself.

The English liked to call us Mr. Gooseberries and Mr. Radishes. Yes, it's true, my name does mean gooseberries. But that's nothing to be ashamed of. My family owns land in France, and that's pretty important back there. Owning land, even just a gooseberry patch, means you are a person of wealth. I wanted more adventure out of life than gooseberries, though, and so I went in search of fur.

In 1659, Pierre and I set out with a small group to find the Aboriginal peoples who had plenty of fur, but we didn't dare face the Iroquois to bring it to us. We spent a cold winter around Lake Superior. We went hungry

a lot, but the following summer, we returned in triumph! We had so many furs, we needed the trappers to help us bring the furs back with us. Then that governor made me so angry. He said we were illegal *coureurs de bois*, with no official **sanction** from the government. He confiscated all our fur, made us pay a fine, and threw me in jail. I resolved that one day, I would get my revenge.

Figure 7.16

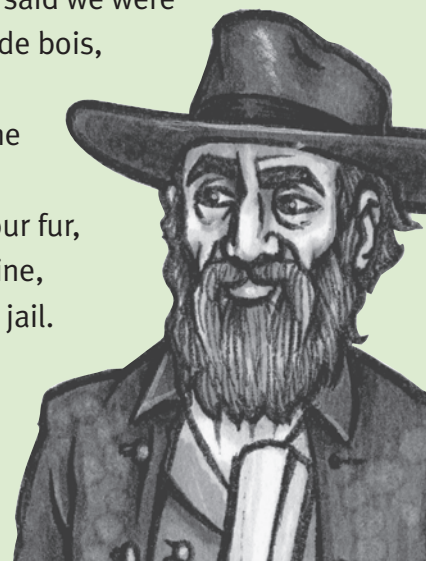


Figure 7.17 Radisson and Groseilliers meet King Charles II of England in 1670.

The English Fur Trade: “The Company of Adventurers”

Although the French were not interested in Radisson and Groseilliers’ plan, Prince Rupert, a cousin of King Charles II of England, was. The prince was also a **privateer** and an inventor. When Prince Rupert met Radisson and Groseilliers, he was eager to back the adventurers and make some money. In 1665, the prince convinced some powerful and influential people to fund an expedition by Radisson and Groseilliers to Hudson Bay.



Figure 7.18 Prince Rupert

It took three years to prepare for the journey. On June 3, 1668, two ships set out from England, with Radisson in one and Groseilliers in the other. Radisson’s ship was damaged in a storm, and he had to return to England. Groseilliers’ ship, the *Nonsuch*, was able to make the journey in 118 days. The crew spent the winter on the Rupert River, and when spring arrived, approximately 300 Cree traders came to the ship with beaver pelts.

The *Nonsuch* was ready to sail back to Europe in June, but Groseilliers had to wait until August for the ice to leave Hudson Bay. When he returned to England in October, the beaver pelts sold well. The trip did not make much money, but the partners still felt the idea had promise. On May 2, 1670, “the Governor and Company of Adventurers of England trading into Hudson’s Bay,”



Figure 7.19 Replica of the *Nonsuch*

as Prince Rupert and his partners were known, were given a royal **charter** by King Charles. The charter granted the company a **monopoly**, or exclusive right, to trade in the lands drained by the waters that flowed into Hudson Bay. Although no one realized it at the time, this land covered close to 7 million square kilometres, or almost 40 percent of present-day Canada. The company would come to be known as the Hudson’s Bay Company.

Prince Rupert became the first governor of the Hudson’s Bay Company, and all the land draining into Hudson Bay was named Rupert’s Land in his honour.

There is a good reason the beaver is on one side of the Canadian nickel. The beaver is a reminder of Canada's early economic history, when the currency of the day was the beaver pelt. The chart (below), found in early documents relating to the Hudson's Bay Company, outlines how many beaver pelts were needed to trade for certain items in 1670.

The STANDARD how the Company's Goods must be barter'd in the *Southern Part of the Bay*.

Guns.	One with the other 10 good Skins; that is, Winter Beaver; 12 Skins for the biggest sort, 10 for the mean, and 8 for the smallest.
Powder.	A Beaver for half a Pound.
Shot.	A Beaver for four Pounds.
Hatchets.	A Beaver for a great and little Hatchet.
Knives.	A Beaver for 6 great Knives, or 8 Jack Knives.
Beads.	A Beaver for half a Pound of Beads.
Lac'd Coats.	Six Beavers for one good Lac'd [laced] Coat.
Plain Coats.	Five Beaver Skins for one Red Plain Coat.
Tobacco.	A Beaver for one Pound.
Kettles.	A Beaver for one Pound of Kettle.
Looking-Glasses and Combs.	Two Skins.

Funny money

Another method of paying for goods was by wampum beads, which the Algonquins made of quahog clamshells. Purple wampum beads were more valuable than white wampum, but war and rivalry between tribes often interrupted the flow of wampum. Later, glass beads from France replaced wampum as popular currency. In 1670, people began to use coins from Europe, but wampum was still preferred by many Aboriginal peoples. The supply of coins was also somewhat unreliable — ships were sometimes late, or sank with their cargo on board. This left the government of New France with a problem: how to pay their soldiers' wages? Intendant de Meulles came up with a good idea that lasted until the British took over New France. He collected all the playing cards he could find and assigned amounts to each of them. When real money arrived from France, the colonists could redeem their playing cards.

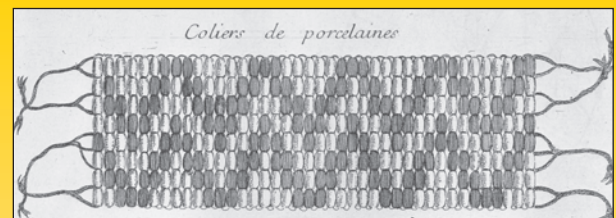


Figure 7.20 Wampum beads



Figure 7.21 Playing card money, front and back

Life at a Hudson's Bay Company Trading Post

The Hudson's Bay Company set up a different way of trading. Instead of building colonies and travelling inland to get fur, the company built their posts on the shores of Hudson Bay, and convinced Aboriginal trappers to bring their furs to the posts. Within 30 years of its founding, the Hudson's Bay Company had built posts at the mouths of many rivers flowing into Hudson Bay. York Factory, built in 1684 and located between the mouths of the Hayes and Nelson rivers, became the company's main post.

The Hudson's Bay Company was owned by **shareholders** who lived in Britain. The office in Britain was run by a company governor and committee. The governor of Rupert's Land represented the company in North America. **Factors** were responsible for the day-to-day dealings at the fur-trade posts (known as factories) and for the clerks and traders who lived there.

Many of the company men came from the Orkney Islands off the northern coast of Scotland. They were strong, hardy, and good boatmen. They soon settled into a daily routine of chores, gathering wood, and hunting food to add to supplies



Figure 7.22 This drawing by the explorer Samuel Hearne is of York Factory.

that came once a year from England. They constructed the posts' buildings. They traded with Aboriginal trappers who travelled to the forts twice a year. They came in spring with their pelts, and in the fall to get provisions for the coming trapping season.

Daily life was dangerous

The northern lands harboured several dangers. Rapids, wild animals, and cold weather or sudden snowstorms in winter took the lives of many adventurers. Others got lost in the woods and never found their way home. Hunger and illness were also ever-present.

The mosquitoes continue at their post from dawn to 8 or 9 o'clock in the morning. The black flies succeed, and remain in the field until sunset; the mosquitoes then mount guard until nightfall and are finally succeeded by gnats, who continue their incessant attacks until dawn....I was incessantly tormented by venomous flies.

—John McLean, employee of the Hudson's Bay Company

In addition to these difficulties, warfare and rivalry between the French and the English took the lives of many people. Early Hudson's Bay Company employees faced constant threats by the French who wanted to take over their forts.

A letter to Governor John Nixon from the company directors in London shows how dangerous life was. Nixon was told that

if he should die, Mr. Walter Farr was to replace him as governor. If Mr. Farr should die, then Mr. Bridger was to take his place. The directors also give instructions for replacing the ship's captain if he should die.

Daily life was uncomfortable

Imagine a bed filled with leaves, straw, or, if you were really lucky, feathers. Imagine your hair freezing to the pillow, and imagine having to break the ice in the wash basin to wash your face. Imagine swarms of biting insects and no repellent. You have had a small glimpse of life at a northern fur-trade post.

Thanks to the Lord I have escaped, Sir, the most dreadful country in the world. I do not think that they will catch me there again.

—M de Bacqueville de la Potherie, 18th-century historian



Figure 7.23 EARLY HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY POSTS

Adventurers, Traders, and Explorers

While the Hudson's Bay Company conducted its trade on the Hudson Bay, it did send out explorers to make new trade alliances with Aboriginal trappers. The company also hoped to find precious metals. The French had their own adventurers who wanted to expand the trade.

Henry Kelsey (1667–1724)

One of the Hudson's Bay Company men who ventured out was Henry Kelsey. He was born in England and began to work for the Hudson's Bay Company when he was around 17 years old. He was the first European explorer to reach the Canadian prairies. He was the first to see bison and the bison hunt, as well as grizzly bears. He liked to write poems, and this is how he described the prairies, the bison, and the grizzly bear in a journal entry of 1690.



Figure 7.24

*The one is a black, a Buffalo great
Another is an outgrown Bear, which is
good meat
His skin to get I have used all ways I can
He is man's food and he makes food
for man...
This plain affords nothing but Beast
and grass
And over it in three days time we past.*

Thanadelthur

Thanadelthur, a Dene woman, escaped her Cree captors in 1714 and sought refuge at York Factory. For Chief Factor James Knight, she provided important information about the rich furs and precious metals in the lands beyond the post. She became an important mediator and translator, establishing peace between the Cree and the Dene and creating important trade alliances for the Hudson's Bay Company.



Figure 7.25

She was one of a very high Spirit and of the firmest Resolution that ever I see .. and of great Courage...the most Melancholy [is it] by the Loss of her.

—James Knight, after Thanadelthur's death in 1717

Anthony Henday

Anthony Henday (worked 1750–1762; birth and death unknown) left York Factory in June 1754. He paddled up the Hayes River, and walked to present-day Red Deer, Alberta. Check the distance on a map!



Figure 7.26

He met the Peigan people from the Alberta plains and hunted bison with them. However, he could not persuade them to travel to Hudson Bay with furs. They were happy trading with French traders. Besides, their chief told him, “we do not paddle, we ride.” The Peigan used horses as their main method of transportation. Henday travelled back to York Factory, where he was laughed at for telling stories about the people who rode horses. The people at the fur-trade post used dogs as beasts of burden, and the description of horses was hard to believe. Henday also brought back valuable information about the French and their fur-trade alliances along the Saskatchewan River.

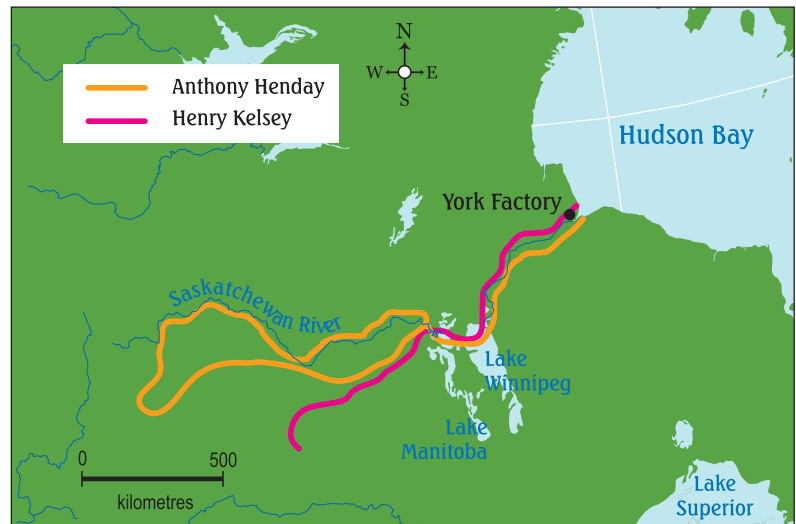
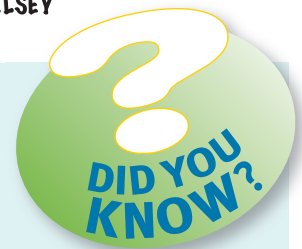


Figure 7.27 TRAVEL ROUTES OF HENDAY AND KELSEY

Both Henday and Kelsey have hydro-electric dams named after them, located near Gillam, Manitoba.



Competition

Recollections of Pierre de La Vérendrye (1689–1745)

Imagine what the fur trader, explorer, soldier, and farmer from Trois-Rivières might tell you if you could talk to him today.

I was more interested in finding the Northwest Passage than I was in working in the fur trade. However, I knew that the merchants of Montreal wouldn't pay me to look for the Western Sea. They were paying me to build forts on the trapping grounds of our Aboriginal partners. In that way, the Montreal merchants hoped they could regain some of the fur trade they had lost to the Hudson's Bay Company. What trader would want to paddle all the way to Hudson Bay when he could go to a trading post only a day or two away?

We set out from Montreal in June of 1731. A few days into our journey, we met some Cree and Assiniboine who were travelling to Hudson Bay. We persuaded them to trade with us, and we got many fine furs. It was like that all the way to Rainy Lake. We reached Rainy River in the fall and built Fort Saint-Pierre. The next spring, we travelled to Lake of the Woods, where we built Fort Saint-Charles.

Of course, we faced many challenges over the next several years. The most difficult one



Figure 7.28 Pierre de La Vérendrye (standing)

was getting enough money to pay for our expeditions. Another problem was finding enough men who were willing to work hard for months at a time. More than once, some of my men abandoned me.

Despite these setbacks, within 12 years, by 1743, my men and I had built eight trading posts. These posts extended from Rainy Lake to Lake Winnipeg. The Montreal merchants benefited greatly from the strategic locations of the forts. Just as the merchants had hoped,

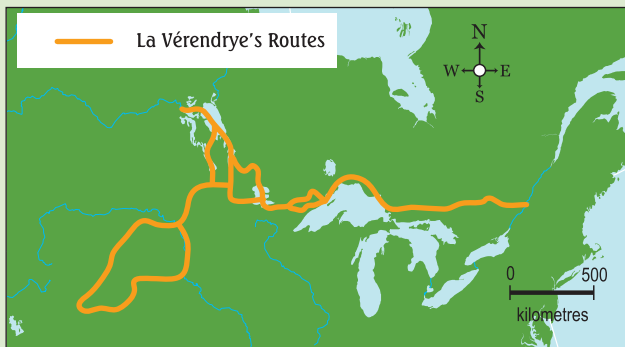


Figure 7.29 LA VÉRENDRYE'S JOURNEYS

many traders brought their pelts to our posts instead of to the English posts on Hudson Bay.

While I didn't find the Western Sea and the route to the East, I strengthened French-Aboriginal friendships. I used all of my skills as a **diplomat** to encourage partnerships with the Cree, Assiniboine, and Mandan. These partnerships cost me a lot. In 1736, one of my sons and several good friends were killed by the Sioux on an island in Lake of the Woods. The Sioux were paying me back, because I had sided with the Cree and Assiniboine against them a couple of years earlier.

Some have said that I didn't have the curiosity or the qualifications to be an explorer. Perhaps I should have spent more time exploring and less time running the forts. I would have realized that the route west was by way of the Saskatchewan River and not the Missouri River. Whatever some people think, I know I played an important role to expand into prime fur-trapping territory.

Pierre Le Moyne d'Iberville

Not everyone thought Pierre Le Moyne d'Iberville was a pirate, but many English settlers did. Born in New France, he attacked English settlements and ships from Hudson Bay to the Caribbean, and he destroyed English fishing villages in Newfoundland. In 1697, d'Iberville turned his attention to the Hudson's Bay Company post York Factory. Aboard the *Pelican*, he battled three British ships and managed to sink one, chase off another, and force the third to surrender. Although the *Pelican* sank, the French were able to capture the fort. They kept York Factory until 1713, when Britain would once again control all the land surrounding Hudson Bay.

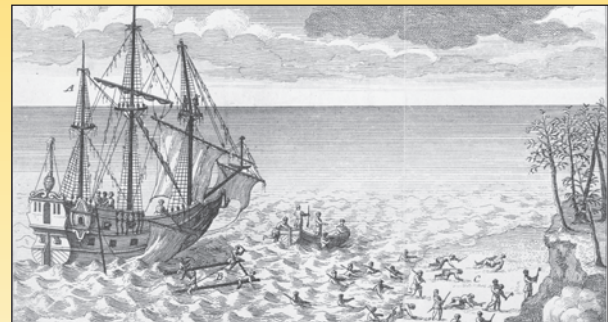


Figure 7.30 *The Sinking of the Pelican*

Conclusion

In this chapter, you learned how the fur trade developed. You also read about how the fur trade played such an important role in the growth of Canada. You learned that the Hudson's Bay Company needed to become more aggressive and expand into new areas if it wanted to compete with the Montreal merchants.

In chapter 8, join Ben on his canoe trip. You will learn how the rivalry between the French merchants and the Hudson's Bay Company resulted in the European expansion into the great Northwest.